NEONELSONIA—A COLOMBIAN FOLK MEDICINE

BY

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IN August 1960, I studied the varieties of *arracacha*, the umbelliferous *Arracacia xanthorhiza* Bancroft, in the Colombian Andes. On one occasion during the study, in the Indian village of Sibundoy (near Pasto) in the Comisaría del Putumayo, a small boy led me to a growth of what he termed "wild arracachas." It was a coarse tangle of an umbelliferous plant clambering over shrubs in an area of 15 square meters. Since this "wild arracacha" appeared to me to be very closely related to the genus I was studying, if not the same, I collected specimens in flower and fruit. When I took them back to one of the older Sibundoy Indians, Juan Pedro Chindoy, he called the plant "íngo-sha-hush" in the Kamsá language.

Utilization

The man told me that the plant is used as a remedy for swelling and inflammation of the upper region of the intestine (*hinchazones intestinales superiores*). Furthermore, he said that it is employed by all Sibundoy women immediately after childbirth "to prevent their death." In both cases, the preparation and dosage is the same: the leaves and stems are boiled well, then some sugar and ten drops of a distilled alcoholic beverage (*trago*) are

added. One-half demitasse cupful (15 cc.?) is taken internally.

Taxonomy

I have identified the Sibundoy "íngo-sha-hush" as *Neonelsonia acuminata* (Bentham) Coulter & Rose ex Drude. *Neonelsonia*, described in 1895 by Coulter and Rose (4), comprises two species: the type, *Neonelsonia ovata* of the mountains of southern Mexico; and the species under consideration here. *Neonelsonia acuminata* is a scandent, herbaceous, essentially glabrous perennial with a long, woody taproot. The leaves are ternately compound with ovate to lanceolate, spinulose-serrate leaflets often lobed toward the base. The compound umbels lack an involucre but possess filiform involucels which frequently surpass the fertile pedicels in length. The greenish yellow petals are obcordate, with a narrow, inflexed tip. The ellipsoid-cordate fruits have five prominent, fleshy ridges.

Neonelsonia acuminata bears many resemblances to various species of *Arracacia*, particularly, as noted by Constance (3), to *A. Pennellii* Constance, *A. Wigginsii* Constance and *A. elata* Wolff. Mathias and Constance (6) recognized six differences between *Neonelsonia* and *Arracacia*. Four of these differences—the shape of the petal apex, the degree of reduction of the calyx, the position of the oil ducts, and the shape of the groove on the seed face—seem unimportant, for upon examination these characters are seen to grade from one genus to the other. Of greater importance in distinguishing these two genera is the wrinkled surface of the fruits of *Neonelsonia*, possibly lacking schlerenchymatous tissue, and more especially, their ellipsoid-cordate form.

Examination of sixteen type specimens of *Arracacia* in the Harvard University Herbarium shows that the

fruit varies from lanceolate and oblong to ovate, but that none are ellipsoid-cordate. In view of the many resemblances between these two genera, however, it is possible that a future monographer of *Arracacia* might emend the genus-concept to include *Neonelsonia*.

Distribution

Specimens of *Neonelsonia acuminata* in the Harvard University Herbarium indicate that its range is Colombian and Ecuadorean, extending from the Departamento del Cauca in the north to the Provincia de Azuay in the south at elevations of 2450 to 3660 meters. My specimens from Sibundoy in the Comisaría del Putumayo, Colombia, were collected at 2100 meters, extending the known altitudinal limits of the species. Another collection, from San Diego near Guachucal, Nariño, is within the previously known range.

Because *Neonelsonia acuminata* is not readily distinguished in the field from *Arracacia Pennellii* and from *A. Wigginsii* when fruits are not available, it is well to note the distribution of these two species of *Arracacia* in central Colombia and central Ecuador, overlapping the range of *N. acuminata*. The specimens of *Arracacia Pennellii* available to Constance (3) when the species was described came from Cundinamarca, Norte de Santander and Santander in Colombia at elevations of 3000 to 3800 meters. Likewise, the specimens of *Arracacia Wigginsii* were collected in Cañar and Azuay (one at 3660 meters) in Ecuador. A later collection, now in the Harvard University Herbarium, is also from Azuay but at 2740 meters. Our present scanty knowledge indicates that of these three species, only *Neonelsonia acuminata* is found in southern Colombia and northern Ecuador and that its altitudinal tolerance extends to lower elevations than does that of the two species of *Arracacia*.

Specimens of *Neonelsonia acuminata* examined

COLOMBIA. Cauca: 3100–3300 m. alt., June 11–13, 1922, *Pennell & Killip 6632, 6676.* Putumayo: 2100 m. alt., August 3, 1960, *Bristol 240.* Nariño: 3140 m. alt., August 10, 1960, *Bristol 241.* ECUADOR. Pichincha: 3000–3600 m. alt., August 13, 1923, *Hitchcock 20881;* March 31, 1920, *Holmgren 449;* 12,000–12,600 ft. alt., 1855, *Couthouy.* Azuay: 8000–9000 ft. alt., July 27–August 12, 1945, *Camp E 4503.*

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